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Class No

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[illegible]

TALK FOR FOOD

A FARCE IN FRUSTRATION

BY

S. GOPAL & V ABDULLA

AS PRESENTED BY
THE P. C. D. C
IN NOVEMBER 1943

PUBLISHERS

SHAKTI KARYALAYAM

MADRAS

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MADURA

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PREFACE

This is just a talk, not a play; more discussion than drama,—though there is drama enough in the grim human tragedy that is being ‘enacted’ in starving Bengal and destitute Bijapur, to single out but two instances. The food situation in India and the consequent famine that has developed in many parts of the country is the *raison d’être* of this farce. And that a “farce” could realistically reflect the present position forms the irony and the pathos of the situation.

This piece is the imaginary account of a “Food and Relief Conference” of certain self-important individuals who have taken upon themselves the task of bringing relief to Ram Rahim, the representative of starving India. ‘Relief for the starving man and glory for themselves’ were their avowed objects, in the chairman’s own words. That the starving man should be saved from death through the aid of others, and that the conference members do not exactly cover themselves with glory, were perhaps the characteristic, and inevitable, outcome of the discussions.

Ram Rahim is starving India; and, as the composite name suggests, he represents both Muslims and Hindus. Hunger practises a ruthless agnosticism in its indiscriminate visitations upon men, setting at

nought all religious and 'communal-cum-national' distinctions. Ram Rahim and his cry for food and shelter form, literally, the background of the talks. In fact, he is the only item of 'stage property'; and indeed, most members of the conference look upon him as such.

At the conference table, you will find served before you a carved cross-section of vocal Indian opinion as it exists today. Attention is drawn to the word *vocal*; for while we have presented all important shades of non-official opinion, there is none to represent the Congress view. It would be neither fair nor in good taste to pillory, even in a farce, an organisation whose representative leaders are in prison. The Congress, as an official body, has not had the chance to express any opinion, or to do anything, for good or for ill, towards solving this problem. That is our justification for having excluded that party. But even so, Congress aims and policies often dominate the discussion, and 'leaders' who differ fundamentally on everything else seem to agree in their detestation of that body. This, again, is a faithful reflection of contemporary India; and readers are free to draw their own conclusions.

A word about the characters. Dr. Wisacre is one of those seasoned chairmen who have convened and presided over many such conferences in the past and who will, if things go on as they are, give many more repeat performances, so help us God. Here he

is also the academic expert who talks pedantic nonsense through his degree-lined turban. Comrade Russiakumaran, who strays into the conference with his hundi box and mass petition and strays out again towards the end, betrays, more than any of the others, that his heart is in the right place; but his feelings are severely cribbed and cabined within the disciplinary walls of his party's policy. The Rajkumar is the caricature of a certain (we hope, vanishing) type of aristocrat in this country; just as the lady is one of the effete *Mesdames* of our society who make history round tea tables - though the species, really, are not as bad as they are painted. Messrs Boomji and Talkisthani are the vociferous, perhaps exaggerating, exponents of their respective communal credos; in the intricacies of map drawing, they are inclined to be deaf to the weak cries of insignificant Ram Rahim. Nobrief and Isaimuthu are the distorted products of one type of South Indian culture; they fight with feline ferocity over the language of music, insensitive to the music of all language.

To Madras audiences, Rao Sahab Ashadabuthi Iyengar is already a familiar figure, having been a Prosecution Witness against Sri Sandhi in "We Accuse". Here, he, the Sanatanist, is also the President of the Profiteers Association. A strange combination, certainly, which, artistically speaking, does not blend. Profiteering and orthodoxy are bed-fellows here of necessity; we certainly do not intend to suggest that they are united in shastraic wedlock.

The expediencies of the stage, however, demanded the telescoping of two very real and definite trends.

Official opinion has not been represented here; for this is the account of a non-official conference of "all-party" and "no party" leader---the two terms seem synonymous in India. But there is a foreign observer, a Mr. Fickles from Anglo-America; a type of journalist ever so common these days. They come to this country equipped with a paucity of intellect and an excess of conceit and claim to have understood, after a two-month aeroplane tour, the Indian problem for which they proceed to provide kindergarten solutions. Mr. Fickles puts forward what he thinks is the official view; but it is neither official fish nor non-official flesh, though it has been very useful dramatic red herring.

Two alternative finales have been provided; either soldiers or civilian volunteers revive the dying Ram Rahim. The choice is a matter of stage direction, depending upon the predilections of the producer.

And so we wind up a preface which shows dangerous tendencies of being Shavian in its length. Doubtless, in these pages we have exaggerated personalities and magnified incidents, but that is after all inherent in a farce; and you will, we hope, laugh. And if you recognise yourself anywhere among these people, you will, no doubt, laugh all the more—even so as to be jerked out of both your seat and your complacency.

All told, we have attempted to portray how talkative India has failed unhappy India in this dark night of crisis. We leave it to your intelligence and sense of humour to judge how far we have succeeded.

Madras,
22-11-43

S. G.

V. A.

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BY WAY OF APOLOGY.

Having chosen for our theme
The piteous plight of Ram Rahim
(Who never has heard of bread or butter,
And now is dying off in Calcutta,
In manner cruel, for want of gruel,
While his rulers rich in London and Delhi
Are belligerently filling their belly),
We must confess we do not deem
The London-Delhi joint regime
Remotely worthy of esteem.

Against all paltering politicians
With selfish ambitions and mutual suspicions
We have let off some angry steam
In this crude little playlet-scream.

Some of our notes are false, and yet,
The whole is true ; ruth and regret
That things should be what now they are
In Vishnu-land. What avatar -
Escaping from what camp or prison,
From what sepulchre re-arisen -
What Prophet the truth in one flash seeing
And to Medina from Mecca fleeing -
Shall come to us and be our saviour ?

Meantime, behold the bumptious behaviour
Of jawing lawyers, and singing shirkers,

And the uniters of the world's workers,
Bediamonded potentates with their artistes,
And elegant ladies made up by modistes.

Our friends, all in a critical mood,
Find food for talk in our 'Talk for Food'.
One thinks his own particular hero -
His own Azad, Gandhi or Nehru,
Identifiable though unnamed -
Has been outrageously defamed
And left unfriended, undefended.
Other persons hypercritical
Say their objection is not political
But purely aesthetic: "Mr. Blabberly
Has been treated rather shabbily.
The Iyengar, too, breathes too much candour.
All this is blatant propaganda
And altogether false psychology."

For these and other faults, apology
In ample measure we offer our readers
(And no less to our loquacious leaders).
We show no way out of these mists;
And we don't mean to enter the lists
As dramatists or economists.
No author in fact can e'er be duller
(Of modesty none can be fuller)
Than S. GOPAL and V. ABDULLA.

THE CHARACTERS

1. **Ram Rahim.**
2. **Dr. Gardhabaswami Wiseacre**, M.A., LL. D., D.D.,
President of the Beachcombers Federation,
Chairman of the Conference.
3. **Comrade C. P. Russiakumaran.**
4. **Lady Stormina Teacup**, Secretary, The
Donothing Ladies' Club.
5. **Rajkumar Sir Prasanna Prakyati Vyagra
Singha Bahadur**
6. **Veer Boomji**, Working Secretary of the Akhand
Sabha.
8. **Janab Aram-Zada Talkisthani.**
7. **Sreeman Rao Saheb Sashtanga Praveena
Ashadabuthi Iyengar.**
9. **Mr. Blabberly Fickles**, Foreign Observer and
Orient Correspondent of *The Transatlantic
Weekly Times*.
10. **Thiru Isaimuthu Pillay**, Vice-President of
The Dravidasthan Propaganda Committee.
11. **M. R. Ry. Natesa Nobrief Pantulu Garu**,
B. A., B. L., Advocate.
A Chaprasi,
Three civilian volunteers (two men and a woman)
Or
Two soldiers in uniform and a nurse.

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(A Farce in Frustration)

[Curtain rises on Ram Rahim, a lean emaciated figure clad in rags, sitting on a raised platform on the top of a hill, crying out for food and shelter. He does this intermittently throughout the play.]

In the foreground are tables and chairs arranged for a conference.

A chaprasi, in skirts, is fussing about with the books and inkstand at the orders of Dr. Gardhabaswami, who stands nearby.

Enter Comrade Russiakumaran jingling a hundi box in his right hand and waving a scroll (a 'mass petition') in his left.]

Rusiakumaran : (as he enters)

Thank you, Comrade.

(Turning to Dr. Gardhabaswami) Hello Comrade, what about you ?

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Gardhabaswami : (*Looking up startled*)

What about what?

Russiakumaran :

Your money in this and your signature here. That is the least you can do for that unhappy representative of the starving and struggling masses. (*Pointing to Ram Rahim*)

Gardhabaswami :

Shades of Shakspeare! You are a strange young man. Do you not know who I am and why I am here? Well, for your information, I may tell you that I am Dr. Gardhabaswami Wiseacre, M.A., LL.D., D.D., President of the All India Beachcombers Federation.....But who could you be?

Russiakumaran : (*Giving the clenched fist salute*)

I am Comrade C. P. Russiakumaran, No. 13, in the Party Hierarchy and an active worker in the Proletarian Cause. Bah, leave these bourgeois names aside; I am more interested in your money and

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your signature. That alone will help this unfortunate creature and the millions of his fellow-proletarians.

Gardhabaswami :

The quack remedies of a charlatan, these. Don't you know I am organising a conference for the very same purpose, and with better chances of success? After all, what can you achieve, with your petitions—an inane symbol of fatuity? And your hundis - a miserable few annas.....Desperate situations demand heroic remedies. A Conference - a full Conference; a representative Conference; a prolonged Conference - that is the only key to that deadlock (*pointing to Ram Rahim*).

Russiakumaran :

A Conference, did you say? And without the invited co-operation of the third biggest party in this country? Why, it's like Engels without Marx.

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Gardhabaswami :

An oversight, young man, I assure you. The defect is easily remedied. As Chairman of the Reception Committee and as President of the Conference, I have full discretionary authority vested in my person; and by virtue of that authority, I hereby extend to you an invitation to this Conference.

Russiakumaran :

I must say that your conference does seem to offer some possibilities of a dialectical solution. Yes, I think Marx would approve. You have my co-operation, Comrade. In fact, we are in the mood to co-operate with anybody.

Gardhabaswami : (*Rubbing his hands*)

Ah, here come your fellow-invitees.

(*The members come in one by one; their names are first announced by the Chaprasi; Dr. Gardhabaswami introduces them to Russiakumaran, who greets each of them with the clenched fist salute.*)

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- (1) Lady Stormina Teacup, Secretary of the Donothing Ladies' Club.
- (2) Rajkumar Sri Prasanna Prakyati Vyagra Singha Bahadur.
- (3) Veer Boomji, Working Secretary of the Akhand Sabha (*with a map*).
- (4) Janab Aram-Zada Talkisthani (*with a map*).
- (5) Sreeman Rao Sahib Sashtanga Praveena Ashadabuthi Iyengar.
- (6) Mr. Blabberly Fickles, Foreign Observer and Orient Correspondent of *The Transatlantic Weekly Times*.
- (7) Thiru Isaimuthu Pillay, Vice-President of The Dravidasthan Propaganda Committee.
- (8) M. R. Ry. Natesa Nobrief Pantulu Garu, B.A., B.L., Advocate.
(*They all sit down*)

Chairman : (*Dr. Gardhabaswami*)

Lady Stormina, Rajkumarsaheb and Gentlemen. We are met here to-day at

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a moment of acute national crisis. We have to put our heads and hearts together and bring relief, aid and succour to our poor unfortunate countryman whom you all see before you.

Nobrief :

Mr. Chairman, I cannot see him. No one can see him ; anyone who says he does is guilty of an irregularity. For Rule 26 under Act XIX of 1628 lays down that no man can be tried in his absence. So, My Lord Chairman, I apply for a *Habeas Corpus*. Without that, the eye of the law sees nothing.

Chairman :

Er...er... What is this ha-ha-habeas something-or-other ? Is it a new type of spectacles ?

Nobrief : (*With a note of contempt*)

Habeas Corpus means 'Produce the Body.'

Chairman :

How can I produce the body when he is still alive ? Wait till he dies. But if

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you are too impatient, I would suggest that you move a resolution that steps be taken to obtain a body from Calcutta where bodies are found in plenty now.

Russiakumaran :

Comrade Chairman, I protest. This talk is absolutely irrelevant. This is not a bourgeois court of law.

Nobrief :

I stand on my feet, Mr. Chairman.....

Boomji :

I beg your pardon ; you happen to be standing on my toes.

Chairman : (*Interrupting Nobrief, who is mumbling an apology.*)

I thank Mr. Russiakumaran for raising a very important point of order. The authorities and the many previous precedents support the contention that this is not a court of law but a relief conference. And I am not a Judge acting judicially. So, Mr. Nobrief may open his

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eyes. Please be seated gentlemen. (*He readjusts the books on the table.*)

To continue my Presidential remarks, I am sure there is not one among us who is not filled with pity at this heartrending sight. (*Points to Ram Rahim*) His stricken cries have caused our warm springs of sympathy to gush forth in the shape of this Conference. It is our duty to-day to find a solution which will bring him salvation and earn us well-merited glory for our sacrifices.....With apologies to our Anglo-American friend for the chivalry we observe here, I shall now call upon Lady Stormina Teacup to commence.

Lady Stormina :

I represent the Donothing Ladies' Club. As our name indicates, we believe in doing nothing except pass resolutions. In fact, we have already passed a resolution placing on record our intense sympathy with this poor stricken man. That is all we need to do. Anyhow

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I am glad that it has been possible to call together a conference of this nature and I thank our distinguished Chairman for inviting our Club here. As we do not believe in speaking in public, I shall content myself with observing the proceedings and reporting the gossip - I mean, the proceedings - to my Club. Thank you.

Fickles :

How absolutely charming! In my country when there is nothing to be said, it is always the ladies who say it. And at the end of the meetings they are so tired they can hardly keep their mouths open.

Chairman :

Now, now, Mr. Fickles, you are evidently a small talk expert; but this is not the place or occasion for it. Let us revert to the main issue. It is now my privilege to call upon Rajkumar Sir Prasanna Prakyati Vyagra Singha Bahadur to graciously address us.

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Rajkumar :

I have come here merely to see that the sacrosanct rights, interests and privileges of the Order to which I belong, are not trampled under foot by this conference of Commoners. We stand by our treaties, covenants, sanads and engagements and we see nothing in them which enjoins us to feed or clothe any beggar that shouts. While our hearts graciously go out in sympathy to that wretch over there, we see no way of helping him without compromising our dignity and our safety. Granting that he must be fed and clothed, it is the job of the hotel-keepers to feed him and the tailors to clothe him. Our task is to govern our loyal subjects and to patronise and support the arts and artistes. We stand firm on the bedrock of paramountcy, our paramountcy, which must of course be for ever paramount. Everything else is secondary and totally beneath our royal attention.

Chairman :

We are deeply grateful to the Rajkumar-

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saheb for his gracious address. (*Turning to the others*) Now gentlemen, yes please.....

(*Boomyi and Talkisthani rise and speak together*)

One at a time, please, gentlemen.

Boomyi :

As a representative of the majority community, I demand my inalienable and indivisible right to speak first.

Talkisthani :

Since I represent the most organisationally advanced nation in this subcontinent, I shall secede from this conference unless I am given priority of speech. Are these eternal atrocities to continue; are we to be oppressed and..

Chairman :

Please, gentlemen, please. I beseech you to be calm. I can assure you there is no need to jockey for priority. We will not form part of an expanded Executive Council.

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Isaimuthu :

It would be more appropriate, Mr. Chairman, if I cool all tempers with a song.

(He immediately begins to hum.)

Nobrief : *(Jumping up)*

My lord Chairman, I protest against this base and unwarranted attempt at using this occasion for furthering the aims of the Dravida Song League. Two can play at this game, Mr. Isaimuthu : if you can sing, I too can.

(Both Isaimuthu and Nobrief sing simultaneously and the discordant 'melodies' go on for a couple of minutes.)

Fickles : *(during a momentary pause)*

Is this a concert or a conference?

Chairman :

Excuse me, Mr. Fickles, it may be both. The accepted canons of Parliamentary Practice throughout the world sanction the procedure of members exercising their option of speaking or singing.

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Fickles :

May not this cherished right be sacrificed
in the interests of our ears ?

Chairman : (*Appealingly*)

I beg your pardon. But this freedom
to sing cannot be tampered with ; for
it has been won after arduous ages of
constitutional struggle.

Fickles :

I see. And are these supposed to be
popular songs ?

Russiakumaran :

Well, the songs *were* popular - till they
started singing them. I say, comrades,
stop acting the fool.

Isaimuthu : (*Stopping dead*)

We are not *acting*, if you please.

Chairman : (*Seizing the moment of silence*)

It is of little concern, gentlemen, who
speaks first; for all the later speeches shall
be given retrospective effect.

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(They all sit down, impressed and mollified)

I shall call on each speaker in alphabetical order. And I would make this request; that those who have nothing to say will do so as quickly as possible. Now Mr. Boomji, please.

Boomji : *(with his map)*

I have with me, gentlemen, the only solution for all *(pointing to Ram Rahim)* his problems. The more I look at his wretched figure and listen to his weak cries, the more I am convinced that I have the only panacea for his ills.

(Unrolls his map)

Look, gentlemen, this is the solution; the only solution that is offered by our history and our geography. From the snow - capped Himalayas to the land of the Rao Saheb, our country is one, indivisibly one and has always been one. We owe every allegiance to this land, our divine mother, which has given us birth. And we owe her the sacred duty

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of standing four - square against any party which threatens to cut her up. The integrity of India is our holy creed and for that we shall live and we shall fight and, if necessary, we shall die. If this country is saved from the peril of vivisection, then alone will it overflow with food and clothing. But this man will not get food and clothing so long as the party that claims to represent him, the party that claims the largest mass following, that party is prepared to negotiate with intransigent minorities clamouring for division. It is foolish and preposterous that the members of my community should be asked to accept the guidance of a party that has for its President a Moulana. It is absurd and ridiculous to ask us to dote and doddle over a platitudinising Pandit who is more anglicised than the most English of Englishmen and who is more interested in the international situation than in internal starvation. Above all, it is fatuous to follow blindfold a medieval

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Mahatma in his political gropings. The theologian of an alien creed, a scatter-brained internationalist, a self-deluded and senile mystic — are these the leaders of our race? No, the very prospect makes us shudder and revolt; and it is lucky for the country that such blind leaders were put out of harm's way before they delivered us bound hand and foot to the tyranny of the minorities. Now, at last (*pointing to Ram Rahim*) this man can hope for food and shelter from his real friends in an undivided nation. (*He sits down*)

Talkisthani : (*with his map*)

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would ever agree on any point and on any issue with the fire-eating Boomji. But I must congratulate him on his true and vivid description of the leaders of a certain party which I need not name. In an otherwise fantastic medley of falsehoods, that alone was the outstanding

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half - truth. For long I have contended that it is that party alone that has stood in the way of this country's progress and foiled every attempt of mine to bring freedom to my people. But far from its President being an astute Islamic divine decoying the other communities, he is nothing but a pitiable puppet, the showboy of the majority clique, used to lead the more susceptible of my people astray. That party which Boomji has so loudly denounced - what is it but the advancing flank of Boomji's own followers? We have had enough of these hoaxes; they deceive us no longer. Such red herrings drawn across.....

Iyengar :

Chi - chi - chi, Mr. Chairman. I protest against the use of this non-vegetarian language. It is sacrilege and blasphemy to my unpolluted ears.

Talkisthani :

Precisely why I have always said, with

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dogmatic reiteration, that we are two different nations. When we cannot even agree about metaphors or menus, how can we hope to agree about minorities - their definition or treatment? The unitary government we now have is the artificial creation of an alien rule. We have nothing in common except our mutual animosities. My hundred million co-religionists in this subcontinent cannot and will not live as one nation with you. It is our faith, as fundamental as our religion, that our true genius can blossom forth only in separate homelands of our own. (*Unrolls his map*) Talkisthan - the land of the pure and the noble - is the sacred and inviolable goal of our aspirations ; it is our life blood, the very air we breathe, our holy religion. And to achieve it, we are prepared to sacrifice our all - even our life. So we demand that in accordance with living facts, this country be split on the lines of our natural national entities, as shown by the green patches on this

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map. Only then will a starving man get relief as befits the strength and traditions of his religion. And until this unequivocal and categorical demand for secession is agreed to here and now, I refuse to participate further in your futile discussions.

Chairman :

It may not be out of place here to acquaint you with the theoretical, economic and statistical implications of the problem you are discussing. As you know, I am one of the official experts on the matter. In fact, I am the first native to hold such an appointment, since a sufficient number of foreign experts were not available on account of the shipping difficulty.

I have made an intensive study of the problem and an extensive survey of the solutions. The chief reason for the present scarcity is *not* a general overall shortage; in fact, I could prove through graphs, percentages and figures that there

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is general abundance in the country. Though the transportation bottlenecks and hoarding have something to do with the matter, the main reason is that the substitutive mean averages of productive consumption and consumptive production have not kept pace with each other, on account of the uncertain nature of the locomotive index of the cost of living. I do not want to go into technicalities though I can prove to the satisfaction of experts that the solution lies in increasing the elasticity of starvation in this country. For further details I would refer you to the 'Inconclusive Pamphlets on Internal Affairs' series and also to my 3-volume work on 'Food and how to eat it'.

It is now my pleasure as your chairman to invite the views of the distinguished journalist, Mr. Fickles. Mr. Fickles has come to us straight across the Atlantic, with a copy of the Charter which he rescued from the depths of the ocean. In fact, his latest book is called 'Inside

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the Atlantic'. His wide and varied knowledge of the food problems of the deep sea fishes and how to fish for them in troubled waters, will certainly prove of immense assistance to us in our deliberations.

Fickles :

I thank the chairman for his very appropriate remarks, and I am delighted that you are all of the very many who are always interested in what I do. As I stand here, I am conscious of the fact that I am addressing not this conference alone but the whole world at large who swear by my articles and the Mr. and Mrs. Smiths of Boston and of posterity whose distinguished representative I am. I very well remember the occasion when I met by very special invitation Her Majesty of the Dodecanese. "My dear Blabberly," she said. "You are...."

Russiakumaran : (*Interrupting*)

Must we listen to this irrelevant nonsense?

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Fickles :

Your Moscow manners do you no credit, young man. The trouble with this country is that the youth are so deplorably sterile. Why, I wrote my first work when I was nineteen. But I must say the elders - Messrs. Boomji and Talkisthani - are better ; I admire their statesmanship and approve of their friendliness to my country. We are proud of our record in this country : for have we not created these great leaders ? Internal complexities do not just grow ; they are always conferred ; and I congratulate you, gentlemen, on your far - sighted suspicion of the so - called majority party. For you, gentlemen, have helped us to achieve a free Commonwealth in which we hang on and mean to hang on to what we have. And as a democracy ourselves, we have encouraged this country to have individual freedom and self - determination even to the point of disintegration. To this Indian problem, which we have provided, it is for you,

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gentlemen, to supply the agreed solution; and when I see Messrs. Boomji and Talkisthani going at it hammer and tongs, I see no cause for regret. Such days as this constitute the proudest days in our island history. We have come here from afar; from across land, sea and air. In fact, we have come as true triphibians and as triphibians we are....

Boomji :

Mr. Chairman, I protest strongly against the use of the word 'triphibian'. It is a wanton murder of language. The word ought to be 'tribian'.

Talkisthani :

I protest against this double murder. Both those formations are wrong. *The* correct word is 'triplibian'.

Nobrief :

I beg to submit, Mr. Chairman.....

Chairman : (*silencing Nobrief with a wave of his hand*)

No more discussion please. The correspondence is closed.

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Fickles: (*continuing*)

And as members of the master race, we Anglo-saxons, claim the right to do what we like with our language as we do with the rest of the world.....Very well then, as triphibians we command success and victory comes to us as no surprise. I come to this Conference after a tour of the country and I have been the guest of all the guns in authority; and throughout my wide travels, I have nowhere come across a better set of detached, hard - working and hardened officials than those you have in this happy country.

On every aspect of this country's problems, I am, as always, suffering from an agony of suppressed information. The only solution to the present problem - I have said it before and I repeat it now - is to put food along with all other problems, in cold storage for the duration. I always carry with me a copy of the Atlantic Charter as a remedy for all disorders; but that, I am

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afraid, I cannot administer to you. The mixture unfortunately ferments East of Suez. Therefore what you need for your food as well as other problems is, as I said, cold storage. And you have our solemn pledge that you will be in cold storage till you unite. Let there be no mistake about the genuineness or sincerity of our ultimate intentions.

Russiakumaran :

It is imperative that this effete symbol of bourgeois culture and plutocratic imperialism be exposed in its true colours. In this country we preserve things by pickling them, Mr. Fickles believes in preserving our problems in cold storage. How appropriate! (*Vehemently*) Does he imagine that our four hundred millions can be put in cold storage till the war is over? How then can they fight a people's war and annihilate the Fascist hordes? We ought to provide the people with people's food to fight the people's war. We are not such fools as Mr. Fickles looks.

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I tell you he is the real enemy - the tool of the bloated capitalist - monopolist-imperialist clique which thinks it can fight a people's war without us, the people. You can't have victory for a song....

Isaimuthu : (*Springing to his feet*)

I disagree with all the emphasis I can command. We have won victories only by songs; and we have silenced our enemies by the strength of our songs.

Nobrief : (*Jumps up and lets out a blood curdling yell*)

Liar! dare you say I am silenced? This man is allowed to talk like this because we have no Province of our own to protect our linguistic integrity and musical autonomy. I say....

Isaimuthu : (*Interrupting*).

You say and I sing.

Nobrief : And if you sing, I sing.

Chairman : (*Cutting in*).

Gentlemen, you seem to be in no mood for a conference.

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Nobrief :

We are not. We are in a hungry mood.
We are in a singing mood. We want to
eat ; we want to sing.

Chairman :

Since we have stomach for only one song
at a time, Mr. Isaimuthu first please
and only one song.

*(Isaimuthu starts singing a song ; but by the
time he gets to the second line, he is
interrupted.)*

Fickles :

Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, are not the
songs of that highly objectionable author
banned ?

Isaimuthu :

They are banned only in schools. Why
can't I sing them here ?

Chairman :

No, no, no, Mr. Fickles is quite right.
If it is not good enough for schools it is
not good enough for us.

(Isaimuthu sits down)

TALK FOR FOOD

Chairman :

Now Mr. Nobrief Pantulu Garu, you can sing *your* song.

(Nobrief sings ; when he finishes his first and starts on a second, he is forcibly dragged down to his seat by those near him.)

Russiakumaran :

As I was saying before I was interrupted by braying nitwits, this war cannot be won on empty stomachs. And these vacuums, which used to be stomachs once, will continue vacant so long as corrupt officials and heartless grabbing profiteers (*points to Iyengar*) like this man are at large, fattening on the lifeblood of the nation. These vipers in our bosom are the fifth columnists of the enemy and the saboteurs of our morale. These parasites must be destroyed root and branch - I hope you understand this vegetarian idiom, Mr. Iyengar.

Iyengar :

This blood - boiling young man has sworn at and cursed me. In fact he has

thirty eight

TALK FOR FOOD

cast aspersions at me with both hands. He has made me lose my temperature. In fact, I would horsewhip him, if I had a horse.

I did not want to come here at first. I am a strong Sanatanist ; in fact, inside my turban I have a tuft. Every morning, after my bath, it waves in the sunshine and the breeze. In fact, I believe that my tuft is the banner of orthodoxy ; it is the home rule flag of Sanatana Dharma.

I was born a Brahmin. And I have always believed that the Brahmins are the cows of the land. In fact, that is why I always support the present Government, for they have always protected and promoted the interests of the cows and the bulls. In fact, they have treated us all as dumb driven cattle. So long as they protect us like that, what does it matter who they are ? In fact, I always tell my wife : “ What does it matter whether it is Rama that rules or Ravana that rules ? ”

TALK FOR FOOD

My Sanatana Dharma also makes me a fervent believer in Karma. In fact, men are born into their respective communities by the preordained will of the Almighty. And it is flying in the face of Providence to say they should unite. That is why I have always said that joint electorates are the work of the devil. In fact, I believe in electoral untouchability.

I am glad of one thing. Our propaganda, though it has failed here, is bearing fruit in distant lands. Look at America. See how they treat their negroes. That is the only way to treat the mlechhas and untouchables here. Again, look at South Africa - the past masters of the principle of untouchability. They have segregated and outcasted the blacks and the browns. There, in South Africa, you have pure Varna Dharma. In fact, look at their Pegging Act. Krishna, Krishna, it makes my mouth water. There is only one panacea for our problems. And that is a proper

TALK FOR FOOD

Pegging Act here. Pass a Pegging Act. Segregate your political and religious untouchables. Keep them outside decent society like ours. That will solve all our problems.

But true Sanatana Dharma is being forgotten in the land of its birth. (*Waving*) These urchins are too young; too inexperienced. They do not understand that golden principle.

In fact, how old are you, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman :

If you must know, Mr. Iyengar, as a matter of fact, I am completing twenty eight years to-day.

Isaimuthu : (*Jumps to his feet with a rhetorical flourish*)

Gentlemen, the completion of twenty eight years is an event in the life of any man; especially in our country, where the average expectation of life is 24, it is a ripe old age. Mr. Chairman, on behalf of this gathering, I congratulate you on this auspicious day.

TALK FOR FOOD

(Picks up a book from the chairman's table and holds it out.)

Allow me to present this to you as a souvenir to commemorate this occasion. Let me add in conclusion that a more formal function lasting one or two months will be organised thirty two years later, when you complete your sixty years. In the meanwhile I shall compose a special song in anticipation of your sixty-first birth day.

(Hands the book over to the Chairman with a bow and sits down.)

Iyengar : *(With hands outstretched in benediction)*

I shall also bestow my asirvathams.

Chairman :

My heart is too full for words. Thank you one and all, gentlemen. Now Mr. Iyengar, you may proceed.

Iyengar :

I shall now put forward my other view :
for I have as many views as I have

forty two

TALK FOR FOOD

platforms. All of you know that I am President of the Profiteers Association. My raw friend here thinks that profiteering is a crime. But he has not understood the world. Everything depends upon money. In fact, look at me. I have one wife and thirteen children, mostly daughters. They have to be co-educated; they have to be married. That is why you have to work and save. What does it matter where the money comes from?

In fact, all this agitation and clamour is unholy. It is unorthodox. It is against your own interests. For example, (*pointing to Russiakumaran*) look at this young man here. He is a promising and presentable young fellow. He has taken a degree - an honours degree. In fact, I myself would have been glad to have him for a son-in-law. He could have got a comfortable job and settled down. But see where his hot-headedness has led him to. He has thrown away all

TALK FOR FOOD

his prospects. He has taken to politics. And the police have taken to chasing him. He calls that serving his country. Leave all this talk about love of country and love of humanity. Your country can very well take care of itself. In fact, it has been doing so for the last thousand years. So why should you young men bother about it? It will go its way, according to the will of the Almighty and our rulers. Don't poke your nose into danger. Service, Kirvice; Country Kintry; all that is humbug. Money is the all-important thing in this Kali Yuga. So stick to your job; make your pile. Then you will get fame and title. That is how I became a Rao Saheb, though I am neither a Rao nor a Saheb. In fact,.....

Russiakumaran : (*Looking at Ram Rahim who is seen lying down, feeble moans coming between weak gasps.*)

Holy Lenin, that man is dying.

TALK FOR FOOD

Chairman :

That makes no difference. The conference shall go on.

Russiakumaran :

I withdraw in protest. I had better collect more signatures to my petition.
(Exit Russiakumaran, without a glance behind, either at the Conference or the dying man.)

Nobrief :

My lord Chairman, I protest against the utterly unconstitutional way in which Mr. Russiakumaran has left the conference.

(Pointing to the volunteers, who are mounting the platform to render aid to Ram Rahim.)

And look at that ! How can they do that without our permission ? It is *ultra vires* and contempt of conference. I demand a ruling.

Chairman :

It is a pertinent point of order, Mr. Nobrief. Let me see what the authorities have to say on the matter.

TALK FOR FOOD

(Is engrossed in looking up references and cross - references during the rest of the action. In the meanwhile the volunteers have come up to the platform and they give a glass of milk to the dying man who visibly revives.)

[NB—Two alternative endings are suggested, to be adopted according to taste.

- (1) The volunteers may be dressed in white *khadi*, with caps on, a lady volunteer, also dressed in white *khadi*, may stand by with clothes for Ram Rahim.
- (2) The men who administer aid may be in military uniform, a lady in nurse's uniform stands by with clothes.]

[The Conference goes on.

Each member shouts his battle-cry.]

Lady Stormina :

Always do nothing.

Rajkumar :

Paramountcy for ever.

Boomji :

Akhand Hindusthan - ki jai.

Talksithani :

Talkisthan Zindabad.

forty six

TALK FOR FOOD

Fickles :

Rule Britannia !

Iyengar :

Sarve janahs sukhino bhavantu.

Isaimuthu :

Hindi ozhiga ; Tamizh vazhga.

Nobrief :

Andhra for the Andhras.

Russiakumaran : (*Peeping in then, and giving his salute*)

Workers of the world, unite.

Chairman : (*After all have finished*)

Order, order.

(*Curtain.....Tagore's 'Jana gana mana' off stage.*)

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